Laura Bush
21st Century Librarian Program

2012 Panelist Handbook
Technical Field Review Panel

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THE LAURA BUSH 21ST CENTURY LIBRARIAN GRANTS REVIEW PROCESS

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant panelist. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your expertise in one of the competitive categories of funding for libraries and archives.

The staff at IMLS has prepared this handbook to ensure fair and candid review of all eligible applications. It will provide you with the procedural information you need. Please use it in conjunction with this year's *Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant Application and Guidelines*. A series of eight *Reviewer 101* web presentations is available on the IMLS Web site under Reviewer Resources: http://www.imls.gov/reviewers/resources.aspx

THE LB21 PROGRAM

The Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant (LB21) program provides Federal grants through an annual, competitive process. In the LB21 program:

- Applications are evaluated by peers;
- Evaluations are based on the application's strength in proving that the applicant:
  - Demonstrates impact as defined in the *Guidelines;*
  - Meets applicable evaluation criteria as outlined in the *LB21 Guidelines*;
  - Addresses one of the categories for this funding cycle as explained in the *Guidelines*; and
  - Aligns with IMLS strategic goals

THE LB21 PROCESS

1. Applicants review the *Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant Application and Guidelines* and submit proposals to IMLS.
2. IMLS receives the grant applications, checks them for eligibility and completeness.
3. IMLS chooses panelists and matches grant applications to those with appropriate expertise.
4. Technical field panelists review the applications and submit comments using the online review system.
5. If necessary, IMLS will host a conference call to discuss those proposals that received significant variance in reviewer evaluations.
6. Overview panelists meet in person to consider recommended proposals and make funding recommendations.
7. IMLS Director makes final funding decisions.
8. IMLS staff notifies successful applicants.
9. IMLS provides feedback to all applicants.

APPLICATION REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

I. First Steps

This handbook outlines an approach to help prepare for the panel review process. Contact IMLS at once and notify the appropriate staff contact if you have questions after reading the following information.

Time Required

Experienced reviewers estimate that it takes two to three hours to evaluate one application. If you are a first time reviewer, you may need more time. We recommend the reviewing process outlined on the following pages.

Conflict of Interest

Read through your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. If there is a potential conflict, contact IMLS immediately. Once you have reviewed an application, you should *never* represent the applicant in dealings with the IMLS or other Federal agencies in regard to this grant application or award.

Confidentiality

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions, project activities or any other information contained in the applications. Contact IMLS if you have any questions concerning an application—do not contact an applicant directly.

Application Completeness

Check your applications to make sure that all required information is included. There are page limits on certain sections (10 pages for Narrative, 2 pages for each resume) and IMLS truncates submissions that run longer. ***If any application appears to be incomplete beyond these circumstances, contact IMLS immediately.***

Schedule of Completion

The chart on the following page presents a week-by-week guide to completing the review process. You may want to use this chart as a model for your own schedule.

SUGGESTED THREE-WEEK REVIEW SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	Check applications for completeness and conflicts of interest Contact IMLS immediately if necessary	Read *LB21 Application and Guidelines* and *Panelist Handbook*	Test online review system; log in; create new password; review instructions	Begin evaluation Scan proposals to understand range of responses Write preliminary notes
WEEK 2	Continue evaluation Begin careful and in-depth reading of proposals	Write detailed comments for each evaluation criterion offline	Cut and paste comments into online review system	
WEEK 3	Determine scores for all applications and make sure the scores reflect the comments	Provide thoughtful "Application Overview" comments for each application	Verify that all comments and scores are in the online review system	Print a copy of comments for your records

II. The Online Review Process

All reviewers must use the online review process. Use this link to access the system: https://e-services.imls.gov/grantapps/reviewers.aspx

Once you are confirmed as a reviewer, IMLS will send you an email with your password. Your login is the e-mail address that is on file with IMLS. When you login to set up your user account you will need to create a new password.

The instructions for creating and submitting your reviews will be at your fingertips. For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, please contact IMLS staff at (202) 653-4700.

Once you have completed giving scores and providing comments for each application assigned to you, submit the entire review to IMLS.

Make sure to print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files.

Reminders

The online review process is a wonderful tool; however, there are a few points regarding the use of the online review process of which you should be aware:

- When accessing this system you can only use the e-mail address IMLS has on file for you.
- IMLS recommends writing comments in a word processor, then cutting and pasting them into the online review system.
- Once you submit your reviews, you cannot go back in and make revisions. To do so, you must contact IMLS and we will authorize your re-entry into the system so you can make changes. However, prior to submitting your reviews, you can repeatedly enter and exit the system without losing your information.
- The online review system works best with Internet Explorer.

III. Evaluating Applications

IMLS asks you to express your professional judgment of each proposal in the following ways: (1) Assess if the proposal addresses category priorities; and (2) Write comments.

Your judgment should reflect how well you think the information provided in each proposal addresses the goals and stated criteria of the specific LB21 category.

You should also assess how well the proposal aligns with the IMLS 2012-2016 strategic goals as detailed in *Creating a Nation of Learners*, available at www.imls.gov/plan. The five strategic goals are:

1. IMLS places the learner at the center and supports engaging experiences in libraries and museums that prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society.

2. IMLS promotes museums and libraries as strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality.

3. IMLS supports exemplary stewardship of museum and library collections and promotes the use of technology to facilitate discovery of knowledge and cultural heritage.

4. IMLS advises the President and Congress on plans, policies, and activities that sustain and increase public access to information and ideas.

5. IMLS achieves excellence in public management and performs as a model organization through strategic alignment of IMLS resources and prioritization of programmatic activities, maximizing value for the American public.

Qualities of a Good Proposal

A good LB21 proposal should:

- Demonstrate impact as defined in the *Guidelines*
- Successfully address each criterion
- Address goals for the appropriate category (Refer to the *Guidelines*.)
- Align with IMLS strategic goals

Read Applications

Read your applications to develop a feel for the range of responses. Take notes as you read. Read each application again.

WRITE COMMENTS

Reread the evaluation criteria. Draft comments that reflect your judgment for each of the evaluation criteria. Write them in a word processor and then cut and paste into the online review system.

Submit final scores for assigned applications no later than the deadline. Please remember to print a copy of each completed review to keep for your files.

If you have other questions about reviewing, please contact Kevin Cherry at (202) 653-4662 or Mary Alice Ball at (202) 653-4730 or Traci Rucker at (202) 653-4689.

GOOD COMMENTS

Some of the characteristics of good comments are:

- Presented in a constructive manner
- Concise, specific, easy to read and understand
- Specific to the individual applicant
- Reflect the professionalism of the reviewer
- Correlate with the rating that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the application's strengths and identifies areas for improvement

Remember: Successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their awards or future applications!

POOR COMMENTS

Comments that are considered poor are vague, irrelevant, insensitive, or unclear. These comments actually hinder the evaluation process rather than help it.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution doesn't need the money—remember, any eligible institution may apply for and receive LB21 funds, regardless of need.
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials, unless you have determined that the materials are missing from the original application. If you are missing *required* materials, contact IMLS immediately.
- Make derogatory remarks—offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity. You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant; if you are unsure how to phrase your concerns, contact IMLS.
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information—your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.